

Conservative Stalwart Paul Weyrich Dies

After decades of unflinching conservative activism, the man who coined the phrase 'moral majority' died Thursday at age 66.



[] Paul Weyrich, one of the 20th century's strongest advocates for conservative causes, died early Thursday morning at age 66. The cause of death was not immediately known, but he had been in declining health for several years.

"American families have lost one of their staunchest and most effective advocates," said Dr. James Dobson, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family. "Had there been no Paul Weyrich, there would be no conservative movement as we know it."

Weyrich was the first to head the powerful Washington, think-tank The Heritage Foundation, which he co-founded in the 1970s. Some consider his forerunner work behind the scenes then as preparation for President Reagan's popular two terms in office.

Weyrich was also chairman and CEO of the Free Congress Foundation, a Washington think-tank focused heavily on cultural conservatism. He is credited with coining the phrase "moral majority" in a conversation with the late Jerry Falwell, who later used the term to name his politically powerful lobbying group.

Weyrich and Falwell are considered two of the key architects of what later became known as the Religious Right.

"Moral courage was a defining trait of Paul himself," said Ed Feulner, current president of The Heritage Foundation. "A political animal of the highest order, he always chose principle over any temporary 'strategic' abandonment of

principle designed to win some transitory political victory. This moral courage was matched with the physical courage he displayed in the face of physical disability in his later years."

"Paul was one of the giants of the conservative movement—a man committed to family, faith, and preserving and expanding freedom both here in America and around the world," said Republican House Minority Leader John Boehner. "His passing is a great loss for conservatism, and for our country."

Weyrich's four decades of advocacy for cultural morality and conservative policies gained him a reputation for preaching traditional values and acting with uncompromising passion. "Was he easy to deal with? Not always," said Phil Truluck, executive vice president of The Heritage Foundation. "Would he tell you the truth if you liked it or not? Absolutely. Was he steadfast to his principles and his love for this country and his family? Without a doubt."

True to a legacy of prolific influence, Weyrich wrote conservative commentary until the end of his life. "The Next Conservatism, A Serious Agenda for the Future" was published online on Thursday, Dec. 18.

In the late-1990s, Weyrich conceded that politics would not solve the problem of morality, after conservatives appeared to have accomplished most of what they had set out to achieve, including a 1994 revolution in Congress led by Newt Gingrich's "Contract With America."

"I think we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics," Weyrich wrote in a letter to his supporters in 1999, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Feulner believes Weyrich will be remembered by the conservative movement as a visionary and a leader. "America is a better and stronger country because of his contributions. He will be sorely missed," he said.

Weyrich is survived by his wife, Joyce, and five children. **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**